

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME!

Miracle Brush Piles



Eastern Box Turtle, *Terrapene Carolina*

Steve Atkins



American Toad, *Bufo Americanus*

Jeff Beane



Black Racer, *Coluber constrictor*



Ground Skink, *Scincella lateralis*

"stop mowing today
create a brush pile chalet
presents on the way"

Figure 1. A brush pile can be home to a variety of reptiles and amphibians. Be sure to watch out for them while building onto or burning your brush piles.

WELCOMING WILDLIFE: It is amazing how easy it is to make even a small piece of property wildlife friendly. Here is a good start: give up mowing at least half of what you are currently mowing and build some brush piles! In a year or less you will notice more birds, reptiles and amphibians. If set up correctly, nature will provide the necessities and inhabitants for your brush pile, allowing you to sit back and enjoy the show!

PROVIDING SHELTER: Food and water are necessities for all living organisms, but most animals also need adequate shelter for protection against predators and weather extremes. Box turtles, young or old, are no exception to this. Dogs and coyotes chew on them and may crush juveniles in their jaws. Other predators have learned to pry open the shell and gain access to limbs or tails. A brush pile provides small crevices in which box turtles can take refuge from predators and weather extremes.

STACK IT OR TOSS IT: Deliberately building a shelter is not always necessary, haphazardly throwing fallen or trimmed branches into a pile can effectively create a wildlife shelter, either in fields or forests. It is fun to build onto the original structure as the seasons pass, creating different wildlife rooms. It's anybody's guess what the wildlife dynamics are in such piles, but creating additional rooms theoretically allows prey refuge from outside predators as well as other inhabitants. Some choose to take a deliberate, or stylistic, approach to brush piles by creating a stacked foundation with a little haphazard to top it off! Below are simple steps to create your own brush pile that will serve as a safe and stable shelter for wildlife.



Photos by Mike Vaughan

Figure 2.

- a. foundation layer,
- b. second layer, starting the third, c. third layer complete, d. finished brush pile.

1. Cut several logs five feet long, about six inches in diameter, to provide the foundation layer. Freshly cut logs will make a longer lasting pile, but wood that has been dead for some years can still be used (Figure 2a).

2. Space six or seven logs on the ground parallel to each other, separated by six to seven inches, to allow space for turtles to crawl between them (Figure 2a).

3. Place a layer of smaller logs, say three to five inches in diameter and five feet long, across the first layer. These logs should touch each other, providing a roof for the spaces you've created with the first layer (Figure 2b).

4. Lay a third layer across the second one and this time the logs can be smaller, whatever is available. These will add weight and stabilize the lower two layers (Figure 2c).

5. Finally, the pile you have built now needs to be made wildlife friendly – and attractive. This can be done by heaping on top any pieces of brush, weeds, and debris that you have available (Figure 2d).



Figure 3. This brush pile was made by loosely piling the prunings from nearby blueberry bushes. It serves as excellent habitat for lizards, turtles, frogs, snakes, insects, birds and mammals. The sheet of tin was added to enhance thermal options of the wildlife habitat brush pile structure. The underneath of the tin provides cover and warmth for wildlife. This pile will require burning soon as invasive vines have now made an appearance.